OBITUARY

Doctor Sidney Vere Pearson

IT is with a stab of anger that one learns the news of Dr. Pearson's death. Despite his seventy-five years he had the enthusiasm and curiosity of a man half that age, and being concerned all his life with the idiosyncrasies of the body and the prolongation of its life, longevity—his own and other people's—had an understandable appeal for him. " I am good for another ten or fifteen years yet," he told me not so long ago, " if I take good care " ; and he was always proud of the fact that after that initial bout of tuberculosis, which occurred to him while he was still a young physician, he had never had a relapse. As soon as he got better he devoted his life (as so many doctors in similar circumstances do) to the care and cure of those afflicted with the same disease.

In physical appearance he was most impressive, tremendously tall, and heavily built, with an assured forthright manner—one would have said at least a Field-marshal or Admiral of the Fleet—but this rather formidable exterior hid an almost feminine compassion, humility and gentleness. And that was the *real* Sidney Vere Pearson. His outlook on life matched his temperament ; he was fiercely idealist, humanitarian and pacifist. During the war when I was staying in his house, relaxing in the diffused sunlight of his gentle and sedative personality, he would exclaim : " What a monstrous thing this war is ! Think of all the care and trouble one takes to restore to health and activity one single ailing human life, and then think of this war which kills more people in a split-second than I can save in a whole lifetime! "

Apart from his family his whole life was dedicated to the welfare of his patients at Mundesley Sanatorium. His visits to our chalets were never hurried or professional. He would lumber in on some cold bitter evening, often when the snow was piling high outside the open windows (for he was a stickler for fresh air), and with an elaborate old-world courtesy he would ask : " May I take a chair, my dear Sir ? " His hefty body would flop down, and with a puckish grin he would ask : " I hope you are getting enough fresh air ? " Then while he described circles with his stethoscope he would discuss his many ideas and theories ; Henry George and systems of land tenure ; town planning and the lay-out of garden cities ; eccentric notions about draining and sewage disposal. It was all rather jumbled together and not linked by any very coherent system of thought. This was partly because he was a bit of a dreamer and partly because his ideas lacked reality, since he had never a chance to discuss them with experts or to put them to the test. It was the price he willingly paid for this dedicated life in a remote Norfolk village.

The trouble he took over his patients and the kindness he showed them were beyond praise. Nothing was too good for them. Realizing that tuberculosis was as subject to emotional as to physical factors (he used to tell me, in support of this theory, how many young people came to the sanatorium just after their honeymoons, which he attributed to their emotional strain and excitement) he overlooked no detail of their welfare, even, if necessary, to the better arrangement of their pillows ; and during the war he made a valiant (but I believe vain) effort to procure them reserved seats in the overcrowded railway carriages. It was characteristic of that idealism, combined with intense compassion, which was the keynote of his whole nature.

RICHARD RUMBOLD.